

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Robert Oshiro

Robert Chosei Oshiro was born in Wahiawā, O'ahu, November 19, 1924. He was educated at Mid-Pacific Institute and graduated in 1943. He then served in the U.S. Army from 1944 to 1946.

After the war, Oshiro continued his education at the University of Hawai'i where he earned his B.A. in 1949. He then studied at Duke University and completed his law degree in 1953.

He returned to Hawai'i and, in 1954, went into private practice.

Oshiro began his political career when he was elected to the state house, where he served from 1959 to 1970. Active in the Democratic party throughout his career, Oshiro served as chairman of the party from 1962 to 1968. He was a key campaign strategist in the 1970 John Burns gubernatorial race, as well as in the 1974, 1978, and 1982 George Ariyoshi gubernatorial campaigns, and the 1986 John Waihee campaign.

Tape No. 17-7-1-88

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert Oshiro (RO)

April 7, 1988

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Chris Conybeare (CC) and Daniel W. Tuttle, Jr. (DT)

Joy Chong: The following interview is with Robert Oshiro. It took place on April 7, 1988.

Interviewees are—interviewers, rather, are Chris Conybeare and Dan Tuttle. The interview took place at KHET studios, at Hawai'i Public Television.

DT: Okay. It's Thursday, April 7th, we're talking to Mr. Robert [Chosei] Oshiro. This is part of our Hawai'i political history—oral history survey that we're doing on videotape. These are for—not intended for broadcast and we'll work out any specific release agreements with Mr. Oshiro as necessary before they're released to anyone.

We should start, I think, sir, with the way we've done all of them, and if you could share a little bit about your own origins, when you were born, and where, and what your parents were doing. And I've seen some of those stories. When and where did you come on the scene?

RO: I'm glad you're asking me that question because I am beginning to feel that anytime you look at a person's background, I think that's a critical part in that person's philosophy or how he does things. Accordingly, I'm very happy to share my background with the audience or whomever.

I was born in a small town called Wahiawā, which was really a plantation town of pineapples. And that's where Dole [Hawaiian Pineapple Company] started, as you well know. I grew up as a country boy; [born] (on) November 19, 1924. So today you're interviewing me at the stage of being a senior citizen. I'm sixty-three years old. My ancestral ethnic background is [Okinawan]. My parents [Chozun and Matsuru Oshiro] were both from Okinawa. And I think that's significant because Okinawa, as you know, is an island community, just as Hawai'i is. It's in the warm climate area. They grew a lot of sugar cane, and [they have a] similar type of background that we have in Hawai'i. So I was exposed to that from a cultural standpoint, as well as from a geographical standpoint, out in Wahiawā.

DT: What kind of job was your father doing back when . . .

RO: My father [Chozun], like so many of our parents, came to Hawai'i as an immigrant laborer. (He) started in the plantation. But at the time that I was born, he was what was then a cowboy. Kemo'o Farm had a dairy in Wahiawā, and they were the primary suppliers of milk

to the military base, Schofield [Barracks]. My father was a cowboy and was handling the cattle there at that time. But much of what I remember is that my father then ended up as a truck crop farmer. And so, basically, my background is one with the small farm, a three-acre parcel.

DT: That meant the whole family had to work, huh?

RO: That meant every one of us worked from the time that we could pull a weed, yes. (Chuckles)

DT: And you must have gone to Wahiawā Elementary School.

RO: I did. Wahiawā Elementary School is where I started out. I might also add that, when you reflect upon those days, I think we had an excellent school system. The reason why I say that is, the teachers were dedicated; very committed. Many of the teachers (came) from the Mainland to teach, and I got exposed to many who were genuinely concerned (about) the youngsters.

DT: And then there was Leilehua High School. I think you went to a variety of high schools, didn't you, after elementary school?

RO: (Yes.) Leilehua High School. Today, we would identify [the site] as Wheeler Elementary School. Leilehua High School then was in the vicinity of Wheeler Air Force Base, and when the war came, the military took (over) the whole school. As a result thereof, we had no school, which then compelled many of us to look at Downtown schools. And that is the only reason why I ended up my senior year [1942-1943] at Mid-Pacific Institute—because we had no high school for an interim period.

DT: That explains it. Mm hmm.

CC: And the war years for you, they were---you ended up in the army, is that right?

RO: I ended up in the army. From Mid-Pacific, I went to [the] University of Hawai'i. I was not a volunteer; I waited for the draft. To be honest with you, I was drafted. And then I went into the service and ended up in what they call MISL[S], Military Intelligence [Service] Language School. I ended up in Japan, and the war ended when the transport ship was between Hawai'i and Japan, which made me happy.

DT: Very fortunate. (Chuckles)

RO: I went in as the first wave of the so-called occupation troop, at that time.

CC: In any of that time, from grade school or high school or in the military, did you give any thought to what you wanted to be doing when you came back, or did you show any interest in things political in those days?

RO: No, I thought the only interest I had was in being a jazz musician. When I was a youngster, I used to end up at the nightclubs and bars on River Street when there were a lot of jazz musicians playing. I was hoping that I would end up being a musician so I took up [the] bass fiddle during high school.

DT: I didn't realize you had that in common with Duke Kawasaki [member, state senate, 1966–1986]. He was a jazz person, right?

RO: That's right. Duke plays, Duke and I, we talked about it. I was surprised that Duke led a band at that time. My interest turned to music, and I even played for [the] Honolulu Junior Symphony during that period. I enjoyed it. I liked it. And that was a tremendous experience for me.

CC: Well, after the war, returning, did you come back immediately to Hawai'i or . . .

RO: Yes, I came back. I came back, and the reason why I'm smiling now is because I thought I'd be an entrepreneur. Rather than coming straight back to college, I said, "Well, I'm going to start a small business." And I talked my mother [Matsuru (Tanaka) Oshiro] into giving me, as I remember now, about \$5,000 to buy a small saimin shop on 'A'ala Street. It's no longer there now, I mean even that street is gone. That's when I first found out how difficult it is to make a dime by being a businessman. That was short-lived, maybe eight months or [a] year at the most. That's when I realized (chuckles) I've got to get back to school.

DT: So that didn't work so well, so you came back to the University of Hawai'i then, or state university?

RO: That is correct. I came back to the University of Hawai'i. I might also add that as far as education is concerned, many of us came to (the) university, especially myself, with the war going on, knowing that (we were) going to get drafted. We were not committed to education. And I can tell you frankly that I had many Fs and Ds. I was barely getting by.

DT: Did you major in business or a lot of pre-legal [as] people did at that time, or was it in arts and science?

RO: No. I was in arts and science. Actually, I was hoping (to go) into pre-med, and then when I came back, I learned that (I was not inclined) towards applied science. In other words, I wasn't for physics, I wasn't for numbers—algebra and those things. So when I realized that I wasn't that type of person, I dropped pre-med. I went into economics and political science and I minored in philosophy.

DT: Well, you were on campus, I think about the same time as Shun [Shunichi] Kimura [judge and former Hawai'i County mayor] was; and Ralph Aoki, I believe, was president of student body . . .

RO: That's right.

DT: . . . about that period, and . . .

RO: That's about the same time.

CC: Why law school?

RO: Well, to be honest with you, it was not predetermined. You've got to go back to the time that we finished college. I don't know if Dan remembers, but (in) 1949 when I graduated, or



[was] about to graduate, we had a big sugar strike, the harbor strike [the ILWU longshore strike lasted 177 days]. And it was THE strike between the labor element and the so-called Merchant Street [the big business community]. As a result, some of us, when we went looking for a job, found out that jobs weren't available. So the next question in my mind (was), what do I do? Fortunately, I still had GI Bill [benefits]. So I said, well, since I dropped pre-med, I didn't qualify for medical school; now what do I qualify for? And (through that) process of elimination, I ended up in law school.

CC: That's how I did it, too.

DT: Why Duke [University], of all places? That's a long way away. West Coast would have been closer?

RO: Duke because after having served in the military, after being exposed to the Mainland life, I was very interested in the Black-White situation. The Civil War, the results of the Civil War, the Black-White. I decided (on) Duke for many reasons, but one was the fact that I wanted to learn in a state where the Civil War and the Black-White problem (existed). I wanted to get exposed to that, that's one. The other is that, of course, North Carolina is warmer than Michigan or New York or Ohio (or) anyplace else. The third is that I wanted to go to a community where, literally, I may be a minority of one or two, or very few minorities and from Hawai'i. I wanted to experience that because then, I would be compelled to live among them and get to learn their ways, and their thoughts. The other thing that struck me was, Duke was a rather liberal law school in this respect: Duke had many professors who came out of the labor department of [the] New Deal era. I checked on them and found that many of them came out of the so-called [Franklin D.] Roosevelt liberal era. At that time, I was very interested in labor-management relations. The interest in labor result(ed) from Dr. Harold Roberts [economist with NLRB and U.S. Department of Labor 1938-1947 and chair of UH Department of Business and Economics, 1948-1950], who was a visiting professor here and who had stimulated my thinking in [the] labor-management area.

DT: There's also the fact that you mentioned the dock strike in 1949, and before that, the major sugar strikes, and things like. Were they things that you became interested in?

RO: That is correct. That is correct. And I was very interested in society from the standpoint (that) when you're looking at labor, you're looking at labor-management. But there's more to society than just labor-management. What about the others? And those are the questions that stimulated me.

DT: When you got back from law school, as I recall, you got into politics—well, first of all, you set up your own private practice out in Wahiawā, right? And then got involved in politics just before the '54 election.

RO: Well, then I came back with one conviction. And that's because of a Professor [John Saeger] Bradway that we had at our law school. He was one of the founders of the legal aid clinic in Philadelphia. He made a statement that lawyers can become the social engineers of any community. I came back with a conviction that as a lawyer, I had an obligation to join [a] political party, and of course, in my case (the) Democrat(ic) party. So one of the first things I did was to join the party. As I recall now, at that time, Tom Gill was in the midst of the party mecha—party disputes and being involved. And Tom was county chairman at that time.

DT: Yeah, he got elected in the spring of '54. Mm hmm.

RO: Yeah, so I always looked upon myself as, so-called, working for Tom. And that's how I got started in the political process.

DT: Was there ever any question in your mind that you would be a Democrat rather than a Republican, or was—did you . . .

RO: No, there was no question in my mind. I felt that the philosophy of the Democratic party, the philosophy of the programs—and, needless to say, Roosevelt had a tremendous impact, and, of course, Harry Truman. So (with) all of those things, to me, there was no question at all. It was just to stand up and be counted.

DT: You came in contact, I thought you did at that time, with Patsy Mink who is politically active out—she's a Wahiawā person, right?

RO: Patsy, no.

DT: Patsy's Waipahu, I guess.

RO: (Yes) Waipahu. But I'd known Patsy at the University (of Hawai'i). I first met Patsy as a classmate at the university. So I've known Patsy from way back in 1948: I've known her, not only in politics.

CC: Were you in—you got involved as a precinct worker in '54, in the '54 campaign?

RO: (Yes), I got involved really in '53 as a precinct president, which is the lowest unit in the political system. And that's how I got involved in the political process. From then on, it's been, you know. . . . Then on hindsight basis, I can understand why now. Whenever you find somebody with an interest in [a party], just grab him and work him.

(Laughter)

DT: Well, I've forgotten. Were you present, because [it was] such a crowded house that night [in 1954], when Tom Gill was elected county chairman at old Linekona School?

RO: No, I wasn't there.

DT: It was a very hot evening, I recall, and the place was bulging, and this was a battle, actually between the [John] Burns forces and the Gill forces.

RO: That is correct. But you know, (it's) interesting, because you've got to look upon me as a country boy at that time. I mean that in the real sense of the word. I was living in Wahiawā, not exposed to the so-called Downtown activities. If you talk about Wahiawā today, you say, (gee), that's way out there, you know, so I wasn't involved in the so-called movement or the activities in town. It's only after years, that I became aware about the so-called Burns group, the Burns faction.

DT: So you were sort of divorced from all of this early infighting between Democrats. See, it had

a lot of trouble from 1948 on. They had the walk out and the stand-patters, and then Burns tried to bring them together in '52; and then in '54, you had the Gill forces.

RO: That's right.

DT: But interesting enough, Gill was your—sort of your hero at the time.

RO: Mentor at that time.

DT: Mentor at that time.

RO: That's right, that's right.

DT: He was sort of fresh back from law school himself.

RO: That's right.

DT: Or relatively new. But you hadn't known him at UH [University of Hawai'i] or . . .

RO: No, no.

DT: I didn't think he went to UH [Gill attended UH 1940–41].

CC: What was campaign work like in that—for you, out in the country in that '54 campaign?

RO: Oh, in '54, a great deal of it was putting together rallies, which was the primary vehicle for campaigning at that time. As you know, those were the days when you didn't spend any money really. You had very little radio, no real television, if any. As far as print is concerned, it was just simple brochures, homemade stuff. So the primary activity was rallies, and the so-called coffee hours to get the candidate to meet the people.

DT: The '54 campaign was quite an exciting one, as I remember it, and you must have been as surprised as quite a number of the other Democrats [were] with the prompt results, shall we say.

RO: Yeah, we were all—even myself—we were all surprised at the results of it. But maybe it (was) the time. The results of the war and the post-war, added to the feelings.

DT: All right. We'll pick it up with the '54 elections after we change tapes.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: This is Robert Oshiro continuation of interview. This is tape number two.

CC: Okay. We can get started again, Dan, if you want to pick it up with the '54. You were discussing the '54 election results.

DT: So the election of '54 was really quite a shock to you, but didn't it make you feel good? It was such a sweeping victory; the first time the Democrats had ever gained control of the

legislature. And you didn't win everything, but Jack Burns came close [in race for delegate to Congress], Frank Fasi came close [in race for mayor of Honolulu], perhaps knocking one another out in the final analysis. But at least you felt, did you not, that you had a winning combination going?

RO: I think the most exciting thing about it all is that all of us came out with a conviction that it can be done. I think that's the most significant thing that came out of that election, and, you know, that's very important. Because in any society—and that's what makes our society so different—when we talk about democracy, our system is democratic in the sense that we go to the polls. Today, when you look at the world over, you find all kinds of methods of trying to change society. I think in '54, that gave us hope, tremendous hope, that this is the avenue that we should work towards, if we want to bring about changes—whether it's political, economic or social. . . . That reinforced the thinking of many of us (as) youngsters, at that time, resulting from our exposure to the World War II experience. I think that's the most important thing that came out of that election. I think (that) gave us the momentum, the desire to get more involved in the political process. I think that gave the impetus, the strength, to what the Democrats have been able to accomplish thereafter.

DT: Well, you certainly turned out to vote in your area, in the leeward area for '54 because Wahiawā, Waipahu, and [the] leeward area went right down the line, really, for Democrats. But surprisingly, even the so-called Republican areas went Democratic that year. But you didn't move, you didn't move—you sort of stayed with the party. You didn't move into the legislature right away, but I think by 1957 or '58, you had become a part of the legislature, had you not, in a staffing sense?

RO: (Yes), a staffing sense, really. My exposure to that was in 1959, the thirty-eighth legislature, when I was asked by Mike Tokunaga, who knew me through the party process, whether I would be interested in clerking for a member of the house. At that time, I was interested enough, so I said (yes). I became the clerk for Sakae Amano, who was from the Kalihi-Pālana area. That's when, as a clerk, I got exposed at that level, (to) all the problems of public utilities, and I became very interested in it.

DT: That was the session, I guess, or was that the first session which was an enlarged legislature under reapportionment, just before statehood?

RO: Just before statehood. So that was an enlarged version. Then my involvement as a candidate [in the 1959 elections] was really one of the most emotional, traumatic experiences for me when we got statehood. Statehood gave me that desire. I want[ed] to participate in laying the foundation for a new state, and I wanted to get involved in the process. At that time, I was naive enough to think that you can do it in one term or two terms.

(Laughter)

DT: But then in early '59, there was a lot of difficulty after the '58 election, was there not? You had some problems organizing the house, as I recall.

RO: That's when, prior to statehood, there was that so-called [Charles] Kauhane faction, and the Elmer Cravalho faction. Elmer emerged [as Speaker of the house], then you had the Tom Gill faction. There was (a) great deal of intra-party disputes going on at that time, very heavy.

CC: But you didn't become involved.

RO: I was not fortunately. I was merely a clerk, so you know, I didn't get involved. Duke Kawasaki and I talked about it, because at that time Duke was a central committeeman, but I was not a central committeeman at that time. But aside from that type of discussion, we were not directly involved. You know, the principals were locked in real battle at that time.

CC: That probably adversely affected the statehood elections for Democrats a little bit; it perhaps allowed [William F.] Quinn to get elected [as governor], and the control of the senate went over to the Republicans. But you had moved into a very secure role in the house, I'm sure, because of the leadership with Elmer Cravalho, which was pretty well established by the time you got into the legislature, right?

RO: That's right. And I enjoyed my almost twelve years there [1959-1970]. As I (said), you know, I thought I'd be there for one, two terms, but I ended up almost, what, (six) terms.

DT: Your very first campaign, wasn't your opponent a fellow by the name of Oshiro [Republican James K. Oshiro]?

RO: Yeah. Yeah.

DT: Did that cause any—you think that was good or bad for you that you were—everybody, the leading candidates had the same name?

RO: (Yes.) At that time I would think that it caused me a great deal of anxiety. But when you look at it hindsight basis, I suppose, it (didn't) really matter because, I think in my case, from the very beginning, I made a point (of going) out (to) meet the people. I really believed in the grassroot organization type of campaigning, and I spent a lot of time on that. I don't think any of my opponents in that area has ever gone on the same kind of program. I always believed in getting into their homes, talking to them, getting through a neighborhood. For me, it was a very rewarding experience because, even in our area, (there were) some homes that you would call, well, undesirable. In other words, we had poverty areas. We had people living hand to mouth. And unless you go out and see it for yourself, you (wouldn't) believe it. But you go back in the so-called boondock areas, they're hidden from the highways or the roads. That is when I first saw (the living conditions of people in abject poverty), and it gave me a sense of refreshing experience that these are the things that I should be concerned about and working towards.

DT: But interesting enough, unlike a lot of lawmakers at that time, perhaps in both parties, instead of drawing a little bit further away from the party, you seemed to draw closer to the Democratic party and became much more involved in Democratic party activity. Wasn't that true, [that] a little bit unlike your colleagues—some of whom would move away, and say, well, it's a personality thing and I'll get reelected and reelected—you opted to stay with the party?

RO: Well, the reason for that is this. . . . I don't know if you remember, Dan—but let me go back. Bill [William] Richardson was state chairman when I became a member of the central committee. Tom Gill, at that time, was the so-called outside element in the party. And Tom—in anticipation of the '62 election, and resulting from the '59 loss where Bill Quinn



(won) and Jack [John A.] Burns lost—started a so-called new movement, and he used [a] resolution to try (to) bring the party together. At that time, he called it the fact-finding committee [to select the best candidates to run in 1962]. Tom started that at the precinct level, it came to the district level, and Bill Richardson, as state chairman at that time, asked me if I would chair the committee. Maybe he asked me to chair it because I was not tainted, really. Being from the country, I was removed from all (the) personality problems. I agreed to do that, and I worked at it (really) hard. I gave it a good effort. I think from that fact-finding committee, so to speak, we were able to bring most of the elements of the party together. They may not (have) agree(d) with certain candidates, but on the whole, it resulted in that.

The second thing is that in 1962, or thereabouts, there was great concern (about) trying to get labor back into the fold as labor movement. If you recall at that time, there was a movement on the part of the so-called Burns faction to have Alvin Shim who was then identified with Tom Gill—he was very close to the labor element—to be state chairman. I didn't know all this, but the person who saw it all, and he's not here anymore—I don't know if Dan remembers—(was) [Delbert] Earl Sturdyvin [then O'ahu county chair].

DT: Right, I remember him well.

RO: Earl Sturdyvin was a Mainland person who came here from Boulder, Colorado. He was a Truman Democrat, and I consider(ed) him one of the wisest politicians in the real sense of the word. Earl Sturdyvin (was) the one (who) felt that, if we went along with the so-called Burns faction, we would destroy the party, that we would be so locked in to the labor element that we would no longer represent the community as a whole. I did not volunteer, but he had positioned me adroitly to a point where I became a candidate for state chairman vis-a-vis Alvin Shim. The day of that so-called convention, I was faced with the choice of, do I undercut my very good friend Earl Sturdyvin or do I just let it go? And by golly, I just kept my mouth shut, and he was able to maneuver the thing [so] that I became state chairman. And that was my involvement.

To be honest with you, I enjoyed my state chairmanship [1962–68] only because I was also a member of the legislature. So I had a perspective of the legislator's point of view and I had a perspective of the so-called grassroot point of view. And I was always constantly trying to bring the two together and get the party members to understand what the legislators go through, and the legislators to understand what the party organization people—out there in the boondocks—go through, and what their hopes are. I think I enjoyed that role. I spent a great deal of time during those years. I spent six years in it, trying to foster that camaraderie, that sense of unity of purpose, the sense of there's a mission here for all of us—it's going to take all of us. I think that's the effort that we gave.

DT: And a lot of people, in looking back on it, don't realize that the Democratic movement, Democratic party movement towards majority status, has had its tenuous moments. In other words, if things had not become unified as they did in '62 and thereafter, factionalism might well have destroyed the party, and given your opposition a new lease on life, shall we say.

RO: That's right. I might also add this, that, I was asked to participate in a seminar put out by the Republican people, not the party. There were some strong Republicans, and they asked me if I would participate. I said, "Oh, I'll be very happy to." This was in '63, '64, and my recommendation to them, at that time, was [to] start from scratch. I still believe that if they

had started from scratch at that time, they would be better off. But you know, you have the hierarchy already set up, and the hierarchy and everything else, so. . . .

(Chuckles)

RO: You know what I'm saying.

DT: Well you weren't too disappointed the Republicans didn't take your advice, were you?  
(Chuckles)

RO: No.

CC: Let me go back a little bit because you just pointed out that you became chairman of the party in opposition really, to the Burns faction candidate for chairman [Alvin Shim]; and yet, in '62, there was also some opposition to whether Burns should run [for governor]—whether Burns could win, right? I mean, he'd lost that one time before [in 1959]. So you ended up sort of, bringing the Burns faction back in, in a way. Or you became involved again.

RO: Well, (yes), I became involved. That is the reason why, in my judgment, and even today, if I look at those critical years, we lost (in) '59, but the fact-finding committee was the most important vehicle we had to bring the party together. The fact-finding committee came out with the conclusion that the strongest viable candidate would be Jack Burns. Now, with that conclusion, we're at the state convention in May. So the Burns faction knows that the report recommends to the party as a whole that Jack Burns is the most viable. They wanted to have an insurance by having a labor-oriented state chairman. This is where the dispute came in because I was identified, up to that point, as an independent Democrat, you know. If anything, I was closer to Tom [Gill] than to Burns. That is the reason why I mentioned Mike Tokunaga's name, because Mike was the one trying to maneuver—Mike and Dan Aoki—maneuver the Alvin Shim state chairmanship.

DT: Which was interesting in a sense because Shim had been somewhat aligned, I guess by marriage [to Marion (Heen) Shim], with the Heen faction.

RO: That is correct. That is correct.

DT: So this got a little bit complicated in those days.

RO: It did get very complicated. As a matter of fact, Ernest Heen, Sr., [who] was at the convention, was not happy with me and made it known to me. But you know, I can understand that.

DT: But you, nonetheless, were able to assume the role of chairman and back Mr. Burns in the gubernatorial race.

RO: Yes. At that time, I think the best thing we did in the fact-finding committee, (was) to have a representative group of all the power groups in the party, the system. So when the report came out, I already knew how each power group would feel and how they were thinking, including the legislators. So it was merely coordinating—mobilizing and coordinating that group. And let me say this. Regardless of personalities, resulting from the '54 that Dan talks

about, the movement, then the '59 [election], we had a setback. All Democrats said we can't miss in '62. That was the conviction that came out of the whole process.

CC: You know it was a remarkable comeback, you might say, . . .

RO: That is right.

DT: . . . but it really just jelled beautifully, and it led to—I mean Jack Burns, I know in December of the previous year and into the early spring—couldn't believe that he actually could make it. But it was in the building. And of course we had basis, because of polls here at the university, that it was likely that he was going to be the next governor, and it worked out that way.

We'll continue with this as soon as we've changed tape again.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: This is the continuation of the Robert Oshiro interview. This is tape number three.

DT: Maybe we ought to take a little look, there were some pleasurable sides of being state chairman, in addition to pulling the factions together and forging victories, both in '62 and '66. In '64, I recall you went to the Democratic national convention, and this was sort of like a birthday celebration, wasn't it?

RO: Well, it was because, you know, we were able to get Jack Burns elected in '62, so Jack was going back as a governor. So it was really a pleasant experience. Then, too, Jack Burns' association with Lyndon Johnson [the Democrat nominee for president]—it was more than (a) strictly governmental relationship, there was a personal relationship. So in many respects, it was a pleasant national convention. Incidentally, it (was) at the convention that Tom [Gill] became the candidate to run against Hiram Fong [for U.S. Senate]. Tom got elected as congressman [in 1962], and he wanted to step up against Hiram Fong, and we encouraged that. But at that national convention—I suggested to Tom that rather than go back to Hawai'i to campaign, maybe he should go back to Washington, D.C., because someone had tipped off Jack Burns that absenteeism would become a big issue for Tom Gill, and I had mentioned that to Tom. Needless to say, Tom did not listen to us at that time. He came right back, he campaigned, and that absenteeism issue was one of the big issues that came out of the campaign.

DT: And they used that unmercifully, didn't they?

RO: That's right.

DT: Over and over again . . .

RO: Over and over again.

DT: . . . in terms of Hiram Fong's campaign.

RO: Yes.



DT: So even at that stage, you were beginning to think more and more in terms of strategic terms for the party, weren't you? In other words, you became—this was sort of laying the ground work for your second career, shall we say, as a political strategist.

RO: Well, I don't know if it's political strategy. It's just that I felt it was good for the party because, frankly, I always liked Tom. As I've said before, I started with Tom way back. Notwithstanding the personal idiosyncrasies that Tom has—I guess we all had them—basically, I felt that Tom (could) make a major contribution as a U.S. senator. And I think many of us wanted him to be the next senator; we were all in favor of that idea.

CC: But that's one instance where the union didn't really cooperate, did it? By that I mean the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, which supported Fong].

RO: Well, yes. Yes, the union did not. And the union did not because we've got to look at Hiram Fong's campaign style, let me put it that way. I think that Hiram came up, basically, through the territorial system. And during territorial politics, it was more [than] a matter of the party label. It was more alignments. So Hiram came out of that mode, and his relationship with the ILWU was based upon that type of relationship. Tom Gill, although he (was) identified as pro labor and everything else, was not able to overcome that type of relationship that Hiram had with (the) ILWU. As you know, most union people—and this is true of all political institutions—like to feel that, "I keep my word," or "I take care my friends," and I think that (was) the situation with Hiram Fong and (the) ILWU. I think all of us—and I've watched this thing over the period of years—I think we've got to accept that as part and parcel of the system. Now, the question then becomes, "How do we overcome that?" I was able to, because in my own personal election. . . . I'll never forget. The hardest election for me was 1962 or thereabouts when I voted against a bill that [the] ILWU wanted, and I come from an ILWU district. They came after me with hammer and tongs in my second election. I had to bypass the leadership and get down to the grassroot members and practically explained to them one on one, you know, what this is all about. So you can get to that membership, but it's difficult.

DT: Well, are there high points of your legislative career, looking at your legislative career which spanned about ten, twelve years, that you're especially proud [of]?

RO: Yes. I tell you very frankly—I don't know what they call it now, I forgot the number of that thing, but I think one of the basic bills—I think it's Act 94, I may be wrong [Act 97 of 1965]. But if you remember, our school system, for example—the counties [had] control [of] the school facilities, and [the] counties had [a] lot of say in the school system. Our judicial system was the same way—the district court system. Also hospitals—the counties owned the hospitals in the county level. We had a basic conviction that each man, each person, is entitled to equality of education, equality of justice, and equality of health. I think when we passed—I think it's Act 94 [Act 97]—(it) laid the foundation for that basic principle [of statewide control and responsibility]. To me, that's important, (and) I hope that they don't tamper with that basic philosophy because that's what we've been trying to do throughout these years—if you're going to pull all our people together, it shouldn't matter whether they live in the Hawai'i Kai area or Kāhala area, or out in Wai'anae and so forth. To be honest with you, we haven't achieved (it) in terms of implementation, but I think the philosophy is still there. I think that's very important.

DT: Well, in other functional areas, they're still debating it. For example, housing right now, the question—should it be a shared function or should it be a function of the state government or should it be a function of the city and county government, those types of issues still persist, don't they?

RO: It still persists, and you refreshed my memory. This is very interesting, Dan, because I was heavily involved in 1970 in the "Housing Czar Bill" at that time [Act 105 of 1970, establishing the Hawai'i Housing Authority]. At that time, as I remember, we had a so-called shortage of 35,000 homes. You look at the numbers today, we're shorter—we have a shortage of 50,000 homes. Okay, the population has grown and everything else, (but) the point is that we haven't really attacked the problem. I think much of our problem is resulting from trying to balance—the check and balance between the state government's role and the county government's role. I think this session, as a matter of fact just a few days ago, the bill [probably Act 15 of 1988, which provides five-year moratorium for HFDC from state and county laws, ordinances and construction or zoning standards in development of affordable housing units] that passed is an attempt by the state government to say that any housing project that falls within the state, and we used to call it Hawai'i Housing (Authority) [now the Housing Finance and Development Corporation], would (have) no check and balance, because the check and balance system has crippled the system in terms of delivering the houses. I think we're going through an experimental process now. I think this is going to be an interesting one. You're correct. It's a realignment of state-county [functions].

CC: Getting back a little bit to the campaigns . . .

DT: Okay. Figured you want to get there pretty soon. (Chuckles)

CC: Well, you know, '66 rolled along and in fact, Mr. [Randolph] Crossley and Dr. [George] Mills [Republican candidates for governor and lieutenant governor] didn't do too bad, compared to—I mean, given the fact that the party had had a chance to consolidate itself and all that. What happened that led to a race being maybe closer than some people felt it should be?

RO: If you really want to identify "the problem," it's really a personality problem. And the problem was between Tom Gill and Jack Burns. This is where, I think, Jack Burns took the position that, rather than Tom Gill as lieutenant governor, (he wanted) someone else. That's all right, except it's the person that Jack picked. Today, he's one of my closest friends, Kenny [Kenneth F.] Brown. Here was Kenny Brown, identified (as a) Republican, identified with the landed gentry, everything that Democrats are not. He was selected or identified by Jack as, "I would prefer to have Kenny Brown," and of course, it never did go over well with the rank-and-file Democrats and the Democratic leadership. As a result of that, I think what happened was that the so-called power structure of the Democratic party was splintered to such an extent that it reflected in the elections.

Incidentally, I was state chairman then, so I'm quite familiar with what happened. When the primary was over with, and Tom survived and Kenny lost, to put it mildly, it was devastating to Jack Burns, who incidentally, got the news when he was in Botswana [representing President Johnson at its independence celebrations], of all places. So it was a traumatic experience for him, emotionally and otherwise. I think the feeling that Jack had wasn't (so) much Kenny losing, but (it was like having) sacrificed a personal friend as a sacrificial lamb.

You know, I think that really got to him. So in the general [election] campaign, do you know that for fifteen days or so, we didn't campaign. We didn't campaign because (chuckles) we couldn't get Jack to the point of accepting the situation. I remember we even had this childhood [priest] from the Catholic church come and talk to Jack, you know, to spend hours into getting him—it was more or less catharsis or whatever—to try and get it all out of his system. He had an extremely difficult time, emotionally, in saying to himself, "Eh, I've got to go out and campaign."

And in fairness to Tom, at that time, Tom was very patient. He said, "I'll do anything, you know, but we've got to work together."

It's only through the last ten days or so, that they were able to work together so that we just won the election. But that explains—it's not that Crossley and Mills were strong, it's that Burns and Tom didn't do enough, you know. Well, they did enough to get by, but not enough to demonstrate strength.

DT: Actually in many ways, Mills had more strength than Crossley had.

RO: That's right.

DT: And that might have carried [the day], if you had not been able to patch up the situation between Burns and Gill.

CC: That patch-up, though, didn't really carry into the administration, did it? Mr. Gill and Mr. Burns had some difficulties being a team once they took office, is that fair to say?

RO: It's a fair statement and let me say this. In fairness to Jack, he recognized the situation so that is why he brought in Pinky [Myron] Thompson as his administrative director, because Pinky Thompson was specifically assigned to work with Tom in behalf of Jack Burns. It was an attempt on the part of Jack to try and see if we could have a (working relationship), you know, because Pinky and Tom come from the same background, in this respect that Tom was OEO [director of the Office of Economic Opportunity], and Pinky was a sociology major, he was very attuned to people. So there was an attempt made. And if you remember, too, Kenny Brown, at one time, was a dollar-a-year man in the governor's office, to try and help him in some of the projects of major consequences. But because of Pinky's involvement, Kenny dropped out. Maybe that was a nice way of, you know, don't rub the salt in the wounds, so to speak.

DT: But this led to Gill actually opposing him, am I right, in '70? Gill opposed the governor [in the 1970 Democrat primary]?

RO: Yes. You know, it's hard to read people, but let me say this. I've always felt that—if you remember, after '64, when Hiram Fong beat Tom, and Tom was out, Jack picked him up as director of OEO. The reason for that is Tom had a special knowledge of OEO programs because in Congress, that's what he worked on. I've always felt that if Tom had worked cooperatively with Jack, I think Jack would have been, literally, locked in in the '70 election.

But Tom, (from) 1966 to 1970, (had) made (it) known through his directors and his department heads, and his programs, that, "I'm here to make it rough for all of you," and so

forth. You know, those things didn't contribute to any harmony. So Tom, coming out in 1970 to take on Jack was no surprise. Also, I think the community, and I say the community, was very much afraid of Tom. Tom knows politics as well as anyone else. You know, to get a third term is almost impossible. You're a political scientist, Dr. Tuttle, and it's very hard. I think Tom, knowing that, challenged Jack Burns. But at the same time, whenever you challenge someone, the friends [are] going to rise on the other side. Then the labor element and some of the business people in town and so forth, rallied around Jack Burns, and that's what happened.

CC: You rallied around Jack Burns yourself.

RO: That's right. I did.

CC: How did—maybe if you can tell us if you remember, what did you do to prepare for that campaign, some of the things your activities entailed.

RO: (Yes.) I go back to '66. I go back to '66 because for me, I was state chairman then, and the way we survived, so to speak, (chuckles) was traumatic. I told myself, I never want to see that again. And the reason why I say that is because I'll never forget a breakfast meeting. Mrs. [Beatrice] Burns called a few of us, myself, Kenny Brown, I think Don Horio. The reason why she called us (was because) she was very concerned about Jack's health, because of his depression. That is when we decided, at that time, to send Don Horio to California [to meet with Burns]. I'm just (telling you this) to share with you the experience I went through in behalf of Mrs. Burns and the family. It was a very traumatic period. So 1970, before 1970, I told myself, if I'm ever going to get involved directly in the campaign, I don't want to go through the same process. In other words, I don't want to see anybody hurt, like Mrs. Burns. So the actual 1970 campaign started in. . . . I got out (as) state chairman in '68, so it really started right after I got out, I would say, 1968, 1969.

CC: So right there. We'll change tapes and pick it back up.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: Okay, this is, coming up, a continuation of interview with Bob Oshiro, videotape number four.

CC: Why don't we pick it back up. You were saying that you left the chairmanship and really started working on the Burns campaign at some point in '68, '69.

RO: I had actually started about January '69. Let me say this, very few people know this. As many people know, Jack wasn't wealthy, you know, I mean modest means. So one of the things that the Burns cabinet did from the very outset, in the [early] part of the administration, was to set up a so-called *tanomoshi* fund. Every director—and deputies too, I think—contributed X dollars, small amount. But the idea here was that Jack can use it for his own personal needs, you know, for protocol or whatever reason. In 1969, they found out that Jack didn't spend a dime, which is not surprising. So then what they did was, they came out to see me and they asked me if I would go and work on this organization full time. And they (asked) me what (were) my expenses and whatnot, I can tell you honestly, because they said, "Okay, we'll pay you \$3,000 a month. You go into it full time."

So from January 1, I mean January of 1969, I was on it full time. And they used the so-called *tanomoshi* fund—not the campaign fund, *tanomoshi* fund—to compensate me. That's when I said, okay, this is my game plan, and I started on it. I wasn't sure. To be honest with you, at that time, we didn't have a candidate, you know. It was just wishful thinking on the part of some people who believed in Jack. Even myself, I didn't have a candidate. But I had to go out into the field, so to speak, to find out what the thinking (was). You know, what is it? What's going on out there? So I spent (a) good six months out in the field, talking to the people, talking to the community people, the grassroot people. I was surprised because there was a lot of misunderstanding, you know, there (were) anti-Jack feelings existing. So then, it became clear that the communication was very sparse (about) what Jack was trying to accomplish. That started this so-called '70 campaign, and it's only in the middle of '69, I think, that we came out with the suggestion—that's when we first recognized how important media is. You know we were talking earlier (about) media. I think that in the 1970 campaign, that's when we went to Jack [John M.] Seigle [of Lennen & Newell], and we brought in [Joseph] Napolitan. And we brought in, really, [a] first-class media campaign. And another interesting thing—let me share with you . . .

#### END OF SIDE ONE

#### SIDE TWO

JC: This is the continuation of the Oshiro interview on videotape number four, slight overlap.

RO: Another interesting thing—let me share with you—is we had Jack Seigle spend almost a day with Jack Burns. We did that to find out whether they liked each other, whether, you know, chemistry-wise, they would work together. Surprisingly, Jack Seigle was very impressed. He came out with a conviction. "I think we can do it, I think we can do it," which is very important. So that's when we committed to Jack Seigle. Same thing with Napolitan [media campaign manager], we brought him in and we talked to him. And you know, very interesting, also, because I like to look upon this as a tactical move in this respect. I've always looked upon (the) '70 campaign as an interesting one in this respect. We spent big bucks for media, for brochures. We had the best, you know, the visible things. But meantime, quietly, we were working our butt off at the grassroot level. We had everything—at the time of the '70 campaign, everything was just falling into place.

CC: When you say that, "Working your butt off," what kinds of numbers does it take for your style of grassroots campaign—using '70 for an example for that, what kind of volunteer . . .

RO: In '70, as I remember, I think we had about 30,000 plus throughout the state. And what are we talking about? I remember going to coffee hours in early '69 when I had only two people. I would drive all the way to Kāne'ohe and talk to two people. Two, sometimes four, sometimes five. These were people who were once so-called Burns people, but they were turned off for whatever reason. So it (was) a matter of getting them to see the big picture, to get them to believe again in the dream that we had, and all that. So once you converse—whether it's one, two, three, or five people—if you sell them in their heart, without you telling them, they are messengers. That's how you get the numbers. We had a good system.



DT: Well, actually, in final analysis, and no one would ever be able to prove this one way or another, but chances are that your grassroots campaign in '70 was even more effective than your media campaign, even though the '70 campaign will be remembered, I suppose, forevermore as a "Catch a Wave" campaign [television campaign]. Hawai'i is just built so the grassroots campaigning is somehow more effective than any amount of media stuff that you used. Do you feel that way, or maybe you just . . .

RO: Well, Dan, I concur [with] what you've just said, and let me explain something here. This is the point that I've been trying to make with a lot of (people)—I don't know if they understand it. It's so easy to rely on media, and media is something everybody sees, and all that. But, in the [John] Waihee campaign [for governor in 1986], we were outblitzed media-wise. But at the very beginning, I told our people, "The media blitz is coming. We've got to sell our candidate to the grassroot people, to the point where anticipating the media coming, they cannot be dislodged." That's the key. In (the) '70 campaign, that's what we did. What you're saying (is) exactly right because you have 30,000 people who are locked in, and no media can dislodge them. As a matter of fact, the media, all it does (is), "Eh, we've got to work harder," you know. Meantime, we're telling our people, "Eh, we're poor, we're broke. We're the underdog." You know, what it does. It traumatizes our troops into, "Eh, we gotta work harder."

DT: And in contrast to that, for example, in [the] more recent campaign you talked about, the Waihee campaign, the [Cecil] Heftel people, literally, had no grassroots support.

RO: That's right. And that campaign, you know—anyway, you're right.

CC: We'll get [to] that one later, yeah.

DT: Other things in mind here, I think.

CC: Well, as we all know, it was in the midst of that term for Jack that he became ill and had to step aside in favor of Mr. [George] Ariyoshi. And I have a newspaper quote from you in here, back before that next campaign, where you predicted that Lieutenant Governor Ariyoshi might be the next candidate for governor and that you thought racial demographics might have something to do with the next campaign. And maybe this is a good point to bring in, your feelings about the ethnic—the role of ethnicity in politics. But didn't you forecast Ariyoshi probably being the strong candidate in '74, before it happened?

RO: Well, not responding exactly to the point you're making, but I think the public record would show this, and I've said this from the time that I can remember from the time I was state chairman. Race is a factor. You've got to keep (it) a factor. Today you want to call it ethnicity; it's a factor. I don't care where—whether you're in New York or wherever, it's going to be a factor. So you've got to look at race or ethnicity as a factor, and then you've [got] to look at your demographics, you know. Where. . . . If your demographics (show) the geography where people are living, the kinds of people living [there] and everything else. For example, in my own district, Wahiawā—Waialua, at one time, I could tell you how many percent (was) Japanese, how many percent Filipinos, you know, all that stuff. I cannot today because I haven't been on top of it.

But in the absence of other factors, (other) elements, a voter is going to vote based upon the

one common thread that he has with the principal, with the candidate, you know. If I'm a (naive) voter, and all I know is that I'm Japanese, he's Japanese, I don't care about anything else, that's the criteria I (would) vote [by]. It's going to happen whether it's Italian or Jewish or whatever it is, you know. You've got to look at voters in the general sense. We can't look at voters as what (we) think they should be, or the intelligent voters that you think they should be. Voters are voters. So you have to work with people as they are. I've always felt that ethnicity is a factor. Now, [with] the so-called, and I use the word sophistication guardedly, the sophistication of society, I don't know when it's going to be, (but) it may be that it won't be that big a factor. But at the time the '74 election, for example, it was a factor. A big one.

CC: I know that Dan has some opinions about this particular [issue], so maybe Dan, you'd like to . . .

DT: Well, I'd follow it up, and I don't think anyone would disagree with you that race or ethnicity is a factor. But in terms of all my studies and my experience has been, that is not the prime factor in Hawaiian politics because other things, normally, override it, rather than ethnicity. In other words, as you were talking about, if there's no other reason laid on the boards why a person should vote for or against a candidate, why then, he may do it by ethnicity. But to simply come up with a boldface statement that race is the essence of Hawaiian politics, is, to my way of thinking, is an error.

RO: I concur with you. That's the reason why I keep on saying, "a" factor. You've got to look at all the elements involved.

CC: And yeah, I don't want to—I mean, Dan, you might ask one of the questions about that—the whole '74 race 'cause how Ariyoshi got to be the candidate and all that is of some interest, too.

DT: Well I could toss that one in because I was put on the spot, maybe answer by—in this fashion or answer the question myself, and see if Mr. Oshiro concurs. I was put on the spot by the Seigle people [in the] early stages of the Ariyoshi campaign, and [they] said, "Do you think a Japanese, a person of Japanese extraction, can be elected governor?"

And without a moment's hesitation, I said, "Of course he can be elected governor. No question in my mind but he can do it."

But, they didn't go one step further and say, "Do you think that you can have a candidate of Japanese extraction for both governor and lieutenant governor, and still win?" I don't know what I would have said. (Chuckles) But that's precisely what happened, isn't it, in '74.

RO: [Nineteen] seventy-four, (yes).

DT: You ended up with [Nelson] Doi on the ticket with Ariyoshi.

RO: That is the reason why, personally, I preferred Dan [Daniel] Akaka, for the very reason you're raising the question. I preferred Akaka.

DT: Because of the balanced ticket philosophy which had . . .

RO: That's right. This so-called balanced ticket has always been a major ingredient from the time that I can remember. You know, you look at all the elections, statewide elections in Hawai'i, we always have looked for balanced tickets. I'm not going to deny it. We try to have a balanced ticket. This is to accommodate the feelings of all groups, let me put it that way. But in '74, I was for Akaka. I openly came out for Akaka at McKinley High School. And at that time. . . . Well anyway, as Dan had indicated, Doi survived.

DT: They both made it [Akaka later became U.S. congressman].

CC: There was some, and I'll just be—I know that it wasn't necessarily popular with some of the people who have been close to Jack [Burns]—Dan Aoki, for instance, I don't think was ever shy about his feelings about Ariyoshi even though he did work for him in that campaign. What were some of the factors that led to some of those kinds of falling outs?

RO: Well, I've studied the question, and as you know, I was very close to Dan [Aoki]. From Dan's eyes, as I saw Dan, you've got to understand that Dan was practically an outer shadow, shadow of Jack Burns. I mean, they were married together in terms of programs, philosophy, everything else, style, too.

George Ariyoshi was a completely different human being. His style was different, his ways were different. He and I used to talk about it. Philosophically, he agreed with everything we thought about. But when it (came) to implementation or thinking, expressing, whatever, he was an entirely different person. And (for) Dan, mentally, this is how Jack did it. Let me use one thing as an example that I got involved in. Dan came out to my office one day. This is about two years after he was with George Ariyoshi [as administrative assistant], and he told me (of) his frustrations and everything else. So I said well, let me see what I can do about it. The problem, (I felt, really was that) George Ariyoshi didn't use Dan where he could be very effective. So I went to explain to George, I said, "You know, George, Dan Aoki is very good in grassroot party politics. If I were you, I would assign him there and just give it to him." He concurred, and yet, here again, the way he delegates is not the style that Jack Burns would: "Eh, Dan, I want you to do this. You go to it." So in that sense, Dan and Governor Ariyoshi, (had what I would call) a vacuum between (them) in terms of chemistry, understanding, all that. But they were two different people, (and) even I had a hard time because George Ariyoshi was a different person.

DT: In many ways, your association with Ariyoshi in . . .

CC: Let's stop and get another tape.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: Okay, this is continuation of Bob Oshiro interview. This is tape number five.

CC: Your associations with George Ariyoshi . . .

DT: Go ahead. You can do it.

CC: Okay. (Chuckles) Mr. Oshiro, wasn't your association with George Ariyoshi and his several campaigns really the result of your long association with Burns, and working with him, and



your feeling that this is what was good for the party and you, in essence, were carrying out, what, perhaps Governor [Burns] really wanted?

RO: Yes, and as a matter of fact, it started really from '74. Jack [Burns] called me one day when he was still at Washington Place, he was already sick. He said, "Bobby, unless you get involved, this man isn't going to make it. I want you to look at it from a standpoint of what it means to all of us at the party," and so forth.

That's how I got involved in the '74 campaign. When George Ariyoshi was elected in '74, I made it very clear to George that I've done my job, this is what Jack wanted me to do. I've done my job, you're on your own. At that time, he asked me if I would participate in a so-called small group or committee. I said, no. I said, "Why don't you pick up your own friends, your people." So I pulled back.

And my involvement in all his campaigns are really not because, if you studied it, I always came in at the last minute. Because in '74—the '78 election was supposed to have been Dan Aoki. But if you remember, Dan Aoki had a mild heart attack, thereabouts, and as a result of that, I was asked to jump in. Just to save the situation, I jumped in. In the '82 election, by that time I was tired of running campaigns and all that, so [it] was supposed to be two of the young people of the so-called next generation, namely Gary Caulfield and Dan Ishii. I had spent much time with them over a period of a year, completely. I thought that everything was in position, but then, here again, I was called the last minute. They told me, "Can you take a fast assessment?"

When I looked at the whole campaign structure, the programs and everything else, I said, "George, you're going to lose."

He said, "Well, that's the reason why I'm asking you." And that is a reason why, in '82, I jumped back in again.

Which reminds me of another story that has [a] little bearing here about Dan Aoki, too. I don't know how many of you remember, but (1976), George Ariyoshi called me in and asked me, "Will you please help John Craven in the '76 congressional election?"

And I said, "Why should I? I don't know him."

Then George told me that he was completely sold on what this man can do in terms of the ocean—OTEC [ocean thermal energy conversion], oceanography, all these things.

DT: Now this was '76, was it?

RO: [Nineteen] seventy-six. So I still remember the date in May, May 19, 1976. I called John Craven out, and he and I spent one whole morning in my office. I said, "You know, John, the governor talked about your program. What kind (of) programs are you talking about?"

So after John explained to me, I got real excited. I said, "John, there's a cause here." You know, "I'll help you." That's how I got involved.

Now, the reason why I bring that story out is because I told the governor, "Governor, you

better help me get help. You gotta pass the word to your directors and your deput(ies), whoever can help." I said, "You don't have to force them." I said, "We're not going [to] do that."

Then you know where Dan Aoki went in that election. Dan Aoki went with [Cec] Heftel, with Don Horio, see. And that's when—when the governor found out about this, [he was] incensed about it because he had specifically told Dan, "I don't want you to work for Heftel. I'm for Craven." That's how, you know, some of the bitterness may have come from some of those situations that developed.

CC: You did pretty well with John Craven, though, for starting from nowhere.

RO: I'll tell you something. John Craven, if it weren't for—he's now a representative, Hal Jones—he would have made it. Our votes were split.

DT: And I think, is it fair to say, would you, maybe you disagree with me that Fred [Frederick] Rohlfing [Republican candidate in 1976] could have been elected as congressman on that occasion if he had known what to do with the people that were available to him after the primary?

RO: (Yes.) In that situation, that's correct.

DT: In my book, he blew his chances, right.

RO: That's right. (Yes), because, you see, we had a big problem. Hal Jones lost, you know, Heftel survived. So it became Heftel and Rohlfing. If Rohlfing had played it right, I think he would have come out.

CC: You mentioned that Craven had a cause. And you have been quoted in articles and interviews as saying that cause is very important in terms of that grassroots support. What cause did you see associated with the Ariyoshi campaigns, or causes? What was there about those campaigns that captured the grassroots?

RO: Well, in the '74 campaign, really, it was a carrying on of the dream of the Burns era, the Burns period. You've got to understand that, because I'm talking to Burns people. So it's easy for them to relate to that.

DT: Almost a heritage at this stage.

RO: That's right, in '78, it was. If you remember, George was being blasted for (the) Kohala Task Force, [an attempt to revitalize the Big Island economy through loans to diversified businesses in the Kohala area after the shutdown of Hāmākua Sugar Company]. He did some very novel things. He was being attacked on it. My feeling was that instead of being defensive about it, let's be offensive because to me, Kohala Task Force is really an effort on the part of the state. You've got to understand the situation that existed there. A dying [sugar] industry, the lifestyle that was being affected, everything. It (was) a small community. But yet, as far as I was concerned, the governor had taken a bold position, let's do something about it. Okay, so (it) failed. I tell you very frankly, it failed only because of the kind of people that were involved in implementing that change. In other words, I hate to say this, but I think many of

the people took advantage of the situation. But, you know, here again, what is the cause there? The cause is, I'm willing to try anything to save a community or the people or the lifestyle, all these things are involved in it. That's us. The focus is back again on the people.

CC: In a way, you seem to have a constant theme of taking what appears to be a negative or a weakness, and turning it around. If the media's strong on the other side, then you seem to find a way to explain that so that it's really—increases your own strength. I remember that '78 campaign, and in the very beginning, I frankly, would have—I was skeptical that Ariyoshi would prevail. I mean, he just seemed to have lost . . .

RO: He made some real major decisions that backfired and so forth. But by doing that, what am I doing? I'm putting him in as a human being. Eh, this guy is no miracle maker, he's you and (me), you know.

DT: And beneath it all, though it may sound corny, is it not true that a lot of what you were doing was for the principles of the Democratic party as such. It may sound old-fashioned today, but you wanted to keep these alive, this sort of spirit that was born in '54, and then carried forth in the wake of statehood and . . .

RO: That was also . . .

DT: . . . even after statehood, it seems to me that that's what's been your prime motivating factor.

RO: That's right.

DT: That you didn't want to lose this, so as a result, you were willing to—Ariyoshi was perhaps less close to you than Burns was. And certainly [John] Waihee was less close than Ariyoshi, probably. And yet, you still opted to lend your support to them, as opposed to something else that would take you away from that heritage, so to speak. Is that expressing it well or not? I don't know.

RO: Very well, Dan. I think that's very well [put] because now, I think what you've just captured in the few words is the significance of '54.

DT: It's a matter of education, and fairness in taxes and housing, and all of the things that was in your platform of '52 and '54.

RO: That's right.

DT: And you've never lost sight of that, and whereas maybe others have, you've tried to keep that spirit going in one way or another.

RO: That's right. That's very important.

CC: At the same time, if 1970 had big bucks, 1978 had some pretty big bucks, too, and the media, the use of media by that time, had really developed. How do you see, and how did you feel, about the kind of media campaigns that have started to have been waged, vis-a-vis your own feeling about the grassroots?

RO: I've said this many times, and let me say (it again:) that I have always, I would even use the word resent(ed) the tremendous use of media. Let me tell you why. You know we talk about very expensive campaigns, multimillion dollar campaigns. You look at their budget; (the) bulk of it goes for media, (the) bulk of it. Your television time, your production, the consultants, you know, all kinds of media experts that you need to put together a decent package. So a bulk of your campaign cost is this. I've always—I'll be honest with you, I've resented that.

So even in the [John] Waihee campaign [in 1986], what I wanted to do was (to) go heavy on the grassroot, go fast and work fast over there, and then have minimum media. Because we knew we couldn't match the other side. So (the) Waihee campaign, for me, was a pilot as to whether or not what I've always believed in could work. What I'm trying to reinforce here is that I think it's too bad that the media, really, has grabbed hold of our campaign [strategy], and maybe it's one of those things. That is the reason why I always, when I ran for office—and you have to remember I ran for office, I ran five times—my campaigns really [were] person-to-person. I believed in it. That doesn't cost too much money.

DT: And we never really established, we should have, you opted not to run after 1970, right? Do you have any particular reasons for that, health reasons or family reasons or . . .

RO: No, no. [Nineteen] seventy was because I wanted to—I kind of saw the day coming when/if Jack [Burns] decides to run, (I'd) have to get involved. So I wanted to be available full time. That's number one. Number two, I wanted to get out of [the] legislature [and] state chairmanship because I had one more ambition at that time. I wanted to go back to school.

DT: Oh really?

RO: And get my doctorate in law. I was accepted as a candidate at Duke [University] Law School, but I could never go back because I was a member of the legislature or I was a state chairman. So I wanted to free myself of those obligations. If Jack didn't run, well, I'll go back to school, you know, because all I needed was another year, and I could have.

DT: And we didn't establish. You really have a Master of Law as well as a Bachelor of Law, which is rather unusual, to this day, I guess, in the Hawai'i community. There [are] not very many people with Master of Law degrees.

RO: And I wanted to go for my doctorate.

DT: That's even more unusual.

RO: (Yes), well. I'm not bragging, but you know what the thesis would have been? The failure of American antitrust laws in the new world—new world competition. Because unless we modified our antitrust laws, how can we compete with the Japanese? And it's happened. Everything that I saw coming, happened.

DT: Interesting.

RO: Because of our antitrust laws some of our problems of not allowing companies to get together to compete with, you know, Mitsubishi or any of these big companies.

DT: Very interesting. But the politics kept coming, people kept running for office, and they kept you busy, and I guess you didn't get to really realize your own personal ambitions, now did you?

RO: No. No, no.

DT: Did you come close at anytime? You had your bags packed or in mid-flight? (Chuckles)

RO: No. All I have here is that I was accepted, and they told me, "You come back and spend one year or whatever," and that's it. I never did go back.

CC: Do you want to catch up to the '84 campaign or [do] you want to talk about this?

DT: No, go ahead with '84, if you want to.

CC: Well, I don't know if we need to dwell on it because it seems it was an extension of the . . .

DT: You mean, '86.

CC: . . . maybe we should just get to the last campaign.

DT: The '86 campaign.

CC: Yeah, the '86 campaign. You got in late on that one. In contrast to other times when you'd been working a year or so in advance, how did you get involved with the Waihee campaign? How did that happen? And when?

RO: Okay, the election was in '86. John [Waihee] first came out to talk to me, I would say, November, December of '85. At that time, I was puzzled because I was not interested. Although I knew John by name, and I ran into John in the '82 campaign, I really didn't know John. So, I would ask, you know, "Give me one good reason why I should get involved in your campaign." I was never satisfied. Let me also make a statement here that Jack Burns was a very philosophical man. He was a great reader of all kinds of classics, the classics.

DT: Particularly, Thomas Jefferson. (Chuckles)

RO: Thomas Jefferson. He was a reader of the philosopher Marcus Aurelius, things like that. So he was a very philosophical man. In his crisp, short statements, he's saying many things. I found George Ariyoshi's not that type. George, more, was a lawyer type, very crisp and narrow in his expressions. With John Waihee, he wasn't a Jack Burns, he wasn't George Ariyoshi. I couldn't quite understand—I had a hard time understanding where he was coming from. Because of that, for your information, I think he came out, I think three, four times. And four times, he would never answer the question. Why should I? What I'm telling him is, what have you got to offer the state? What's good for Hawai'i? You know. Never did get it.

Then, in 1986, April, as you know, Bill [William] Paty announced that he's going to be the chairman [of Waihee's campaign]. I think it was in March. But anyway, one day Bill calls me up, in April. He said, "Bob, can you help out an old friend?"

I said, "(Yes)." You know Bill is (from) Waialua. I've known him (a) long (time).

He said, "Well, we're having a strategy meeting on a so and so Sunday. Will you come in and share your *mana'o* with us?"

I said, "Well, all right." So the Friday before Saturday, I called him back. I said, "Look Bill, what do you want me to do?" Because I don't want to get caught. I don't want to get a secret agenda or whatever. I said, "What do you want from me? I don't want to raise false expectation."

He said, "All I want you to do is to react to the discussion."

I said, "Okay. Fine."

DT: Let's stop here, change the tapes, and then we'll react to the . . .

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: This is tape number six of the Oshiro interview. This is the last tape.

DT: You just related that Mr. Paty gave you a call to see if you could help with the strategy session with the Waihee campaign, and you were responding to him.

RO: Yes. So that Saturday, as I had promised him, I went to the so-called, headquarters. The first thing I did when I walked into the room was looked around the room. Then I spent almost three, four hours over there. But to make a long story short, right then and there, right after that meeting—not that day, but a few days later, I went to see John, at the lieutenant governor's office. I said, "John, if (they are) your key people, you're going to lose."

He said, "What the hell you think I've been asking you." You know.

So, I said, "Well, let me think about it." About a week later, I went back to him, and I told him, "Okay, John." I said, "Let's talk about it, the whole thing." I said, "What are you trying to accomplish? Why?" And then I told him, "You give me your background." Then I spent many hours researching John's background. And what caught my eyes—where he was born, his background, his anti-establishment, activist movements back on the Mainland, Martin Luther King.

DT: The con-con, I guess.

RO: (Yes), the con-con [the 1978 constitutional convention]. Then I found out that he was the leader of the so-called law school sit-in. At the same time, I found out he was [an] Eagle Scout when he was a youngster. So I saw here a person (who) reminded me of many of the young people today, who want to change things. That's what I saw him as. So, that kind of intrigued me. Then I looked at the other candidates, and I said, "Gee, Hawai'i is going to change. If we're going to change—achieve some of the things we're thinking about, this may be the young man to do it." I liked his age. That's how I committed to John. Not because of any specific program, but here was a man, that at forty, at that time, thirty-nine or something when I met him, [at] forty, I was intrigued by his desire for change. To me, con-con



represented a desire for change from within the system. That's what it told me, and I liked that. I don't care for people who yell for change from the outside and all that. I like people who come in(to) the system and try to change from there. So I liked that. That's how I became committed to John.

And the other thing is this. I told John, "One thing I'm going to ask you," and I said, "I've always had this, but with you, I, not knowing you, I want this to be made very clear. I want complete authority [over] the campaign." I had to have it because the time frame was so short.

DT: Isn't it fair to say, also, that perhaps, you were not too impressed with the alternatives available to the Waihee candidacy? Wasn't there that side to it?

RO: Oh, (yes). That's a very fair statement. That's a fair statement. I was not, I was not impressed with our Democratic candidates other than Waihee.

DT: As a matter of fact, I think in some corners, there was a feeling that this would be sort of a disaster if this were to occur because of the lack of rapport between the other candidates and the community.

RO: (Yes.)

DT: In terms of your—the things which you felt had been motivated and what you had stood for within the community, it's sort of unthinkable that this sort of things should—might end the progressive steps taken since 1954.

RO: (Yes), let me also point out, Dan, that I've always believed that, I don't care how good your system is, or all these programs and so forth, ultimately, what you're doing is, you are buying a person, the character, whatever character he has, or everything about a human being. If that guy has no value or the value is different from yours, well, that's the value you're buying if you get him elected. I could only relate to John's value based upon his profile. I couldn't with the other candidate. I couldn't see it.

DT: How'd you pull it off?

RO: Hard work.

CC: What was the key? When did you think you had a chance? I mean, it must have been fairly dismaying when you walked in there those first days, and they didn't have anything, right?

RO: Well, (yes). There were a lot of people out there who had assumed that John had no chance. That's point one. This is the same thing that happened in 1974 with Ariyoshi, or '78. That has never deterred me. If the people are reachable, if you give them an understanding of where we are, I felt that we had lot of groups that could do that. And let me be candid. I felt that if I could motivate the Hawaiians to understand that for the first time they have an opportunity to have a first elected Hawaiian governor, will they rise to the occasion?

So that's an element that we've never had before. If you look at all the elections, we've never had that group as such. As a matter of fact, we lost them, most of them. As far as the other

groups, as a matter of fact, you know, the [Heftel] campaign that we were competing against was nothing but media. That's all it was. So when (you) have a media campaign, there are no bodies. In other words, the bodies were available for the picking. So all we had to do was identify the bodies, where are they, what groups and everything else, and we began pounding away. Then, there came a critical time in the campaign when we needed the media, and we desperately scraped some money together, and we put on the media. That was just to let the people know that we're alive. It wasn't to change votes or whatever, but it was to let them know we're alive. But meantime, the grassroot . . .

DT: Isn't it fair to say that the press, as media, by that—I mean regular newspaper press and television—had sort of created the notion that [Cecil] Heftel had a great big lead, when actually, it was not---whatever the lead he had, if he had a lead, I'm not even convinced that he had a lead, it was very soft because of his lack of grassroot support? Is that a fair statement to make?

RO: Very fair. As a matter of fact, I think I used that term soft---that his support is soft; that it can be taken. And when (you) go on a media campaign, you haven't locked anybody in. Because of the media, they may lean towards you because they have no other media to compare with, you know. So Heftel's strength became also his weakness, let me put it that way. It gave him self-assurance that was really unreliable.

CC: You used the underdog feeling a bit, too, yeah?

RO: Oh definitely. To me, that was our strength. I had to. And it worked. And it wasn't just an argument. We were. Do you realize, when we got involved in Waihee's campaign, we had no headquarters? We had no budget. We were X dollars in the hole. We had no telephone.

CC: It was really. . . . [The] media campaign, was a disaster, too. What little he had was a disaster.

RO: That's right. I didn't want to get to that, but.

(Chuckles)

RO: It was.

CC: Sorry. (Chuckles)

RO: It was. It was a disaster.

DT: At what point in this, did you start feeling pretty good about it all? Was it in August, or September? Was it?

RO: When was the primary, now? I would say about . . .

DT: Was it September 19, or something like that?

RO: (Yes), I would say about ten, fifteen days before the primary. I felt very comfortable that the momentum was coming in. We were very comfortable. We were comfortable in the sense



that, as long as we don't let up, we keep on pushing, all our elements were there, we were all right.

DT: Is there any one thing that Heftel did, that you think really blew it for him, or do you think it was just . . .

RO: I think the papers, press, helped us in this respect when the press played up how much money was spent. You remember that financial reporting? That confirmed to our grassroot people: we're the underdogs, we're the David, he's the Goliath. You know, all these psychological elements came into play. And you know, one thing about the grassroot people, most of them, they don't know what a million dollars is. Okay, they see these numbers, a million dollars being spent by a (political) candidate, well, that motivates them the other way. And we're going to show them, and it really helped us.

DT: Okay, we have to ask, what about the smear? The so-called smear tactics?

RO: I can tell you this, you know, the allegations were made constantly, innuendos were made. Let me say for the record, we did not do it. Not from our campaign headquarters, nor from the campaign. As a matter of fact, we received a copy of the report, I think, a day before. I turned mine in. The smear thing, and I have my own theory, but that's only a theory. But I want to make it very clear that we had nothing to do with it.

CC: Nonetheless, did it have an effect in the campaign?

RO: It may, it may. I'm not going to deny it. It may have had a negative impact insofar as Heftel's campaign is concerned. As to whether it helped us, I really don't know. (I'll) tell you why. Because our momentum was there. You see, when in a campaign, you try to peak (on) that election day, you know. That's what you're trying to do. We had timed our campaign for that peaking. I personally don't think that it was a factor. It may have been, I don't know, but my own guess is not. We would have won, anyway.

CC: You have some questions about that campaign?

DT: Not particularly about that campaign, unless you want to move on? I just have . . .

CC: No, that's—go ahead. I just wanted to cover some of those major events there, but maybe you have some things you'd like to cover in terms of . . .

DT: I was just thinking, his whole career has stood for party, party participation, doing what's good for [the] party and what the party has to say about what's good for the state, of the state, shall we say. Yet, the Democratic party today is sort of a shell of what it was, let's say, back in 1959. In other---put another way, the Democratic party, as a party, has not really organizationally developed the way, I think, you would have liked it or the way I might have liked it. What's your feeling about that situation today, and what about the future as you look down the road?

RO: Well, let me touch upon that because you're touching on something—the six years that I was state chairman, I had started on an educational program. I thought I had implanted it. What I tried to do was to periodically issue white papers, so to speak, on the various issues of the

period. We had two or three out, then my term expired. That program has never been carried forth. I think that program has never been carried forth. I think that the political party as such has ended up only (being) interested in elections. I think this is (what) our political parties are now concerned with. I feel that a political party has a bigger obligation. We have to go into education. When I say education, at least have the party organization aware as to what the party's all about, what we did, why we [are] doing this, where we [are] going, how we (are) going to get there, so that the grassroots will understand the process. I think, this, we haven't done. And the other thing, (too), that I think the kind of experience that those of us in the '54 class, so to speak, and thereafter, came forth with, nobody else can [or] has had the opportunity to experience, especially the young ones today, the ones you run into today. So we're talking about a different generation. We have literally come across a full circle of one complete generation.

CC: Do you see the fact that these things that you say have developed, do you see any chance that we're going to see a strong two-party system again in Hawai'i?

RO: I think so. It depends upon what the Republicans do. Let me say this. If the Republicans would take advantage of [Pat] Robertson's group, even if they can get 50 percent of them to stay in and participate and expand their vision—aside from the religious, moral issue—and expand them to other issues, hey, they've got a potential there. They've got a potential.

DT: On the other hand, they're still quibbling about when to hold their convention. (Chuckles) That's happened before, hasn't it. Perhaps that's been your greatest friend over the years, is their squibbling, their squibbling and squabbling. (Chuckles) I think we've gone on probably long enough.

CC: Yeah, I think this is far enough.

DT: I have a lot more things I'd like to cover, but I think—unless you have something more, why, we should thank our guest.

CC: Yeah, I think . . .

DT: We appreciate your being with us today.

CC: I've certainly learned a lot. Thank you.

DT: Maybe we'll return to it again some day. (Chuckles)

CC: Well, after this next campaign, we'll see you over again.

JC: That's the end of the Bob Oshiro interview.

END OF INTERVIEW

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